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# the national grasslands

## Custer National Forest

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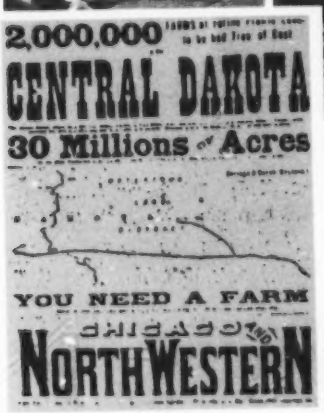
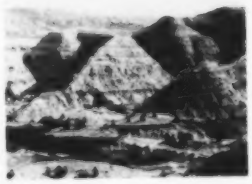
# Trials and Tribulations



## Settlements On The Rise

The rolling prairie, badlands, river bottoms and sand dunes found in the Grasslands offer a great variety of landscapes and a variety of habitats for wildlife. The buffalo herds which thrived in this country were the lifeblood of a number of Indian tribes who once occupied the grasslands.

By the late 1800's, the Indians had lost their historic use of the grasslands as cattlemen replaced bison with cattle. Prospectors, trappers, soldiers, railroad builders, and a host of others seeking their fortunes in the west helped push back the last frontier as they crossed and claimed these lands.

Late in the 19th century, another group of people came to these lands. They were not just passing through; they were the homesteaders - farm families and immigrants who had been encouraged to move onto the Great Plains through homesteading legislation. In its most liberal phase, this legislation offered up to 640 acres of free land to those willing to accept the challenge of plains agriculture. Unfortunately, much of the free land that was settled under this legislation never should have been brought under the plow.

The river bottoms filled up first with the later homesteads filed on land that has since become known as "submarginal." This pattern of settlement, together with the settlers' lack of experience in dryland farming, was fated to have tragic consequences.

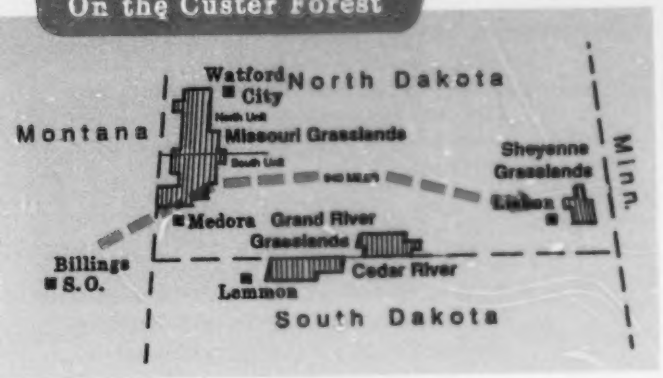
At first nature was cooperative. For several years precipitation was above normal, and the newly-broken, fertile ground provided good yields. Encouraged by the homesteaders' success, local governments established schools, roads, town halls, and other expensive improvements. Communities built up large debts and taxes increased. Then, in the early 1920's, the homesteaders' situation took a dramatic turn.

Intensive farming began to take a toll on soil productivity and crop yields began to decrease. Market prices dropped, since crops were no longer needed to support the World War I effort. Decreasing demand, accompanied by rising transportation costs to distant markets, further diminished homesteaders' profits. To make matters worse, it seemed that nature, too, had turned against them.

# National Grassland logistics

## On the Custer Forest

**National Grasslands are publicly owned lands administered by the Forest Service, United States Department of Agriculture. There are four National Grasslands in the Northern Region. They occur as large blocks of land located in North and South Dakota and are administered by the Custer National Forest which is headquartered in Billings, Montana.**




The Grasslands are not unique to the Northern Region; there are a number of them scattered through out the United States. All Grasslands have a common history in that they are lands acquired by the federal government between 1933 and 1943 under several legislative Acts designed to purchase and restore damaged submarginal lands in the "dust bowl" areas.

Most Grasslands, including those in the Northern Region, are not solid blocks of National Forest System lands; rather, they are intermingled with other federal, state and privately owned lands. This mixed ownership pattern contributes to the uniqueness of the National Grasslands.

### LANDS ON THE MOVE

During the mid-1920's, rainfall diminished drastically, leaving homesteaders with no crops to harvest. As soil moisture continued to decrease, newly planted crops did not sprout, and the bare soil was exposed to relentless winds. With no vegetation or roots to hold it in place, the soil began to move as it had never moved before.

The Great Plains dust storms of the the 1930's became stark testimony to the error of land policy and incorrect utilization. The financial crisis created by the Great Depression, coupled with nature's intense drought, made the situation on the Great Plains even worse. By the early thirties, as many as 70 percent of the homesteaders were delinquent in their taxes. Hundreds of thousands of them were forced to leave, and many more were forced to stay, since they had no money. There was nowhere to turn.

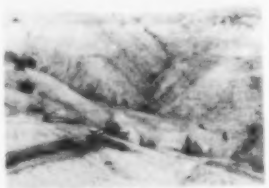
### TO STABILIZE THE SOIL

The disaster throughout the plains received national attention when dust storms darkened the skies over much of the east. The need to reclaim the land and help the stranded homesteaders that could not afford to move became apparent.

Under the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 and the Emergency Relief Appropriations Act of 1935, thousands of acres classified as "submarginal" were purchased by the government. These government purchased lands were called Land Utilization Projects, and the Land Utilization (LU) Program was designed to bring about better land use by making adjustments that would achieve a balance between rural populations and the land. The LU Program was administered by five different federal agencies until it was transferred to the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) in 1938.

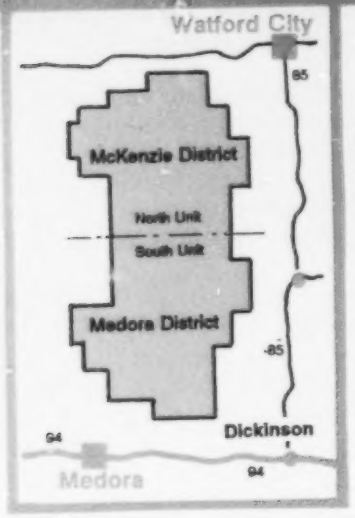
From 1933 to 1943 land purchases continued and hundreds of thousands of acres were reclaimed. Much of the land was seeded to crested wheat-grass, thousands of small dams were built, hundreds of miles of tree windbreaks (shelterbelts) were planted, and erosion control devices were installed to prevent excessive runoff and to let the gullies heal. Civil Conservation Corps and Work Project Administration members accomplished many of the improvements. The homesteaders who managed to survive the difficult times also participated in the recovery of the lands by forming grazing associations to control grazing practices and by participating in the development of conservation practices that endure today. By 1945, these lands once again supported soil-stabilizing grasses.

As a result of reorganization within the U.S. Department of Agriculture, administration of these lands was assigned to the Forest Service on January 2, 1954. After several years of consideration, the decision was made to retain these lands for the benefit of the public. Their designation was changed from Land Utilization Projects to National Grasslands by Order of the Secretary of Agriculture on June 20, 1960. The Grasslands were given their current colorful names on April 1, 1961, and an administrative boundary was established for each one on May 27, 1969.



# Little Missouri national grasslands

north unit–south unit North Dakota




# McKenzie District

**The Little Missouri National Grassland includes more than one million acres of public land and is administered by two Ranger Districts: the McKenzie Ranger District, headquartered in Watford City, North Dakota, and the Medora Ranger District which is headquartered in Dickinson, North Dakota. This is the largest and most diverse of the 19 Grasslands located in 11 western states.**

The 140-mile stretch of rolling prairie, badlands, woody draws and high buttes is home to much of North Dakota's wildlife population. These are working lands, too, where the Forest Service permits grazing of domestic livestock by 450 local ranchers who are organized into four grazing associations. Oil and gas, some of it buried under nearly three miles of ancient sediments, is produced from the Little Missouri National Grassland to help meet the nation's energy needs. A portion of the revenues from grazing fees and mineral royalties is returned to the state and counties for public education and roads.

The Little Missouri Grassland is a treasure of natural science, revealing its secrets to scientists and others who come here to study and conduct research. Plants and animals, rocks and minerals, precious water resources and even the air have been studied in this unique outdoor laboratory.

The north half of the Little Missouri National Grassland is known as the McKenzie Ranger District. The public lands here are used in conjunction with private lands where ranch headquarters are located and where cattle are winter grazed, fed, calved and worked. After calving in March and April, the cattle are turned into large, common pastures on the Grassland in May or early June. These common pastures feature a variety of dams, dugouts, waterlines, and fences to aide in livestock distribution, thus maintaining proper utilization. Cattle remain in the common pastures until late fall or early winter when most of the calves are weaned and sent to feedlots. The cows are returned to the ranch headquarters in November or December where they winter graze or are fed until calving time when the cycle begins again. The McKenzie District has over 190 such ranching operations with more than 22,000 cows.

Wildlife is plentiful on the McKenzie District where visitors may see bighorn sheep, elk, antelope, whitetail deer and mule deer in many areas. There are sharptail grouse dancing areas, prairie dog towns and more than one hundred eagle and falcon nests. Fish have been stocked in some of the reservoirs, and Ducks Unlimited has constructed impoundments for waterfowl habitat. Wild turkeys frequent timbered areas along the Little Missouri.

The McKenzie District features four "low development" areas, totaling 35,000 acres: Long X, Horse Creek, Lone Butte and Cottonwood Creek. These areas offer visitors open space, solitude and opportunities to hike, view wildlife and explore the badlands and midgrass prairie.

# Medora District

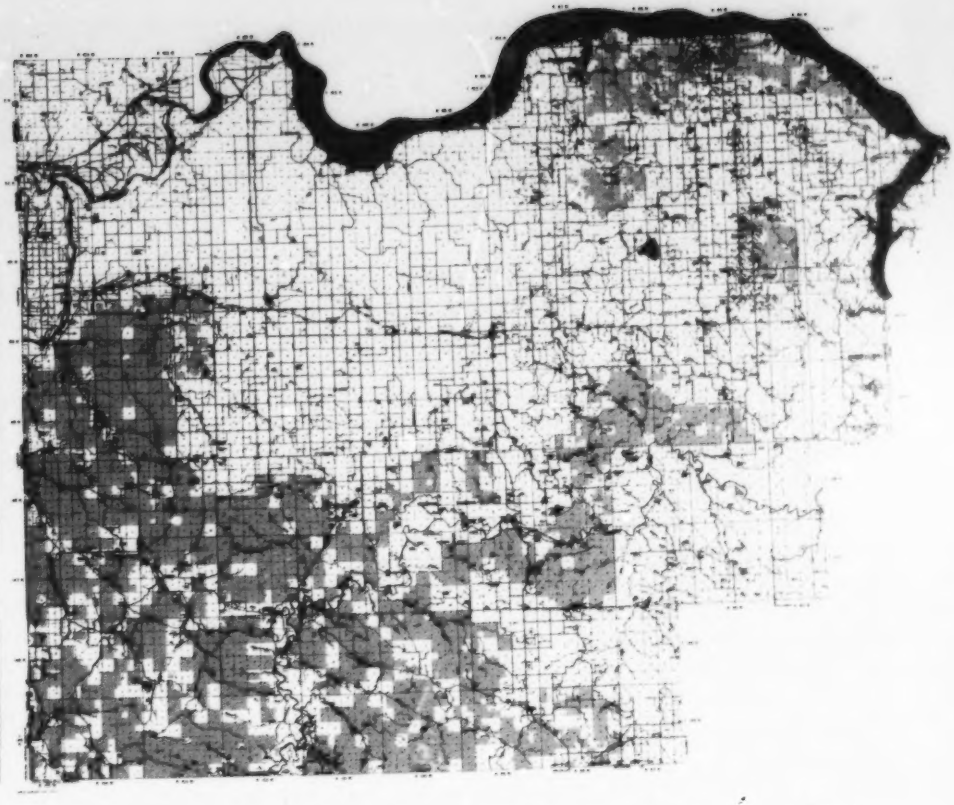
The south half of the Little Missouri National Grassland is known as the Medora Ranger District. Like her sister district to the north, the Medora District is rich in history, mineral wealth and biological diversity.

The only stand of limber pine in North Dakota is located just north of Marmarth. This stand is believed to have been planted prior to European settlement of the area by Indians who valued the large seeds of this species as a food source. West of Amidon visitors can relax in the cool shade of the only natural ponderosa pine forest in the state. The pines area supports good populations of whitetail and mule deer as well as wild turkey and numerous species of song birds.

The area between the pines and the town of Medora is relatively undeveloped and is managed for grazing, open space values and wildlife habitat. This segment of the badlands has the highest density mule deer population in the state, not to mention antelope, turkey and upland game birds. The Medora District has herds of bighorn sheep in the Tracy Mountain area, at Dutchman's Barn near Square Butte and along Magpie Creek in the north end of Billings County.

General Custer's historic trail to the Little Bighorn crosses the badlands just south of Medora and is marked on the District maps available from the Forest Service. Carved in the soft sandstone at a site on Davis Creek known as Initial Rock, are the names of two of the troopers of the 7th cavalry and the date the expedition camped there. Unfortunately, time, weathering and a few thoughtless people have taken their toll on this historic treasure.

Remnants of prehistoric dinosaurs are occasionally found in the sedimentary formations of the Grassland. Permits have been issued to universities and other scientific organizations for exploration and excavation of this paleontological resource.

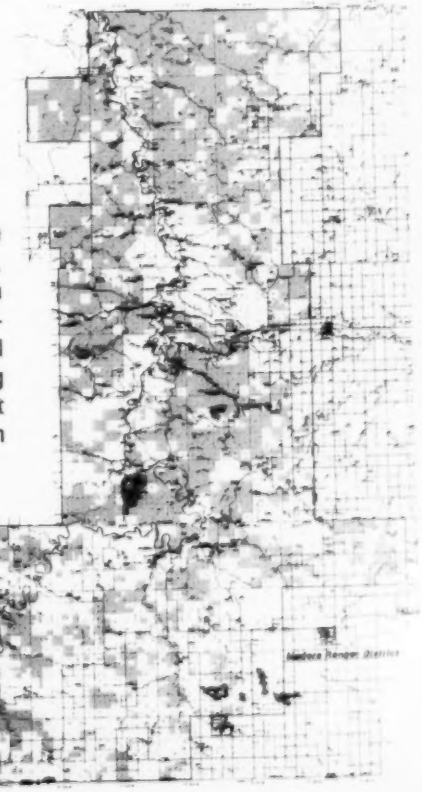


Although dispersed recreation opportunities are most prevalent, there are two established campgrounds on the McKenzie District. Summit Campground, about 20 miles south of Watford City, offers visitors a view of the badlands along US Highway 85. Sather Lake Campground, about 20 miles southwest of Alexander, has fishing, swimming and restricted boating. Both campgrounds are primitive facilities, and drinking water is not provided.

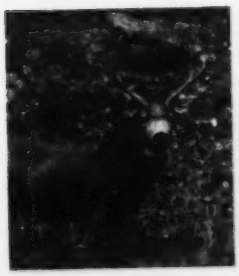
Man has lived in western North Dakota for thousands of years, and evidence of past hunting and habitation can be found in many places on the Little Missouri National Grassland.

More than 500 archaeological sites have been discovered on the McKenzie District, and some have been excavated for their educational and scientific values.

Petrified stumps and logs of prehistoric Giant Sequoia trees are common in the area and provide many photographic opportunities.



The Medora District has a developed campground at Buffalo Gap just off of Interstate 94 west of the town of Medora. From Memorial Day through Labor Day weekends, this modern, 35-unit campground offers running water and comfort stations with flush toilets. Visitors may also stay at Burning Coal Vein Campground where an underground lignite seam has been burning for over a century. The fumes from the coal smoke have caused a morphological change in the juniper trees over the years giving them an interesting columnar shape. This is also the site where the last buffalo hunt in North Dakota took place. Whitetail Picnic Area, five miles west of US 85 just north of Fairfield, is a popular spot for picnics and family get-togethers.



# Grand River-Cedar River national grasslands

Lemmon, South Dakota

## GRAND RIVER

The Grand River National Grassland consists of approximately 197,000 acres located in Perkins, Corson, and Ziebach counties in northwestern South Dakota. The area is characterized by rolling hills, river breaks, and some badlands types in an area dominated by mixed grass prairie. The north and south forks of the Grand River dissect the land unit, drain into Shadehill Reservoir and then flow easterly into the Missouri River.

The Grand River National Grassland provides seasonal forage for approximately 12,000 head of livestock belonging to about 110 local ranching families. The area also supports substantial wildlife populations of whitetail and mule deer, antelope, sharptail grouse, giant Canadian geese, coyotes, fox, prairie dogs, various types of ducks, and numerous nongame species.

Dispersed recreation is encouraged on the Grand River National Grassland, and opportunities for camping, photography, and viewing of native vegetation and wildlife are abundant. Big game and upland bird hunting is a major fall activity, and the area's warm water fisheries offer year-round opportunities for anglers to practice their sport.

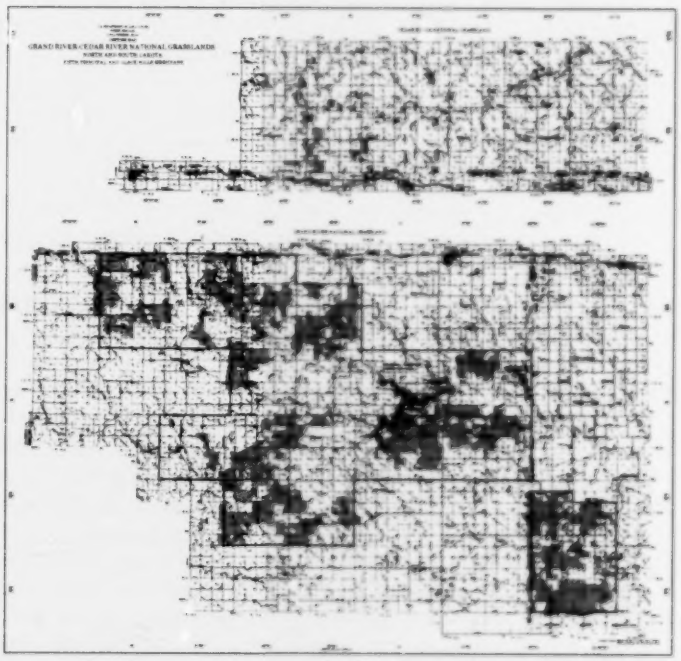
The Grand River National Grassland has a rich cultural heritage. In the past it served as a hunting ground for the nomadic plains Indian tribes. The grassland was visited by early trappers and explorers including Jim Bridger, Hugh Glass, and General George Custer. It was at the confluence of the north and south forks of the Grand River that Hugh Glass was mauled by a grizzly bear and from here that he made his legendary return to safety by crawling and dragging himself several hundred miles. On one of their expeditions to the Black Hills, Custer's troops left their mark on the area by digging a "US 7" into a nearby hillside. The insignia is still visible after more than 100 years. Marks left by the Indians, including teepee rings and the remnants of campsites, are scattered across the grassland.

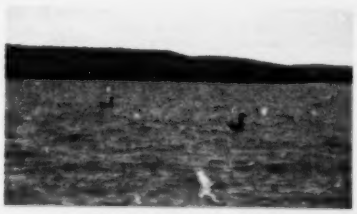
## CEDAR RIVER

The Cedar River National Grassland comprises approximately 6700 acres of mixed-grass prairie situated along the North Dakota - South Dakota border in southwestern North Dakota. The topography varies from level plains to rolling hills which are intersected by occasional intermittent streams and dry draws.

The area provides seasonal forage for approximately 650 head of livestock and contributes to the support of 12 local ranching families. Numerous wildlife species, including whitetail deer, mule deer, antelope, sharptail grouse, fox, coyote, and many other nongame species are native to the area.

Dispersed camping is welcome on the Cedar River National Grasslands; athough, there are no developed campgrounds on the unit. The area offers good opportunities for wildlife and wildflower photography, as well as the study of native vegetation.





# Sheyenne national grasslands

Lisbon, North Dakota

The Sheyenne National Grassland comprises approximately 70,180 acres of public lands associated with 64,769 acres of privately owned lands located in Ransom and Richland Counties in eastern North Dakota. The Ranger District Office is located in Lisbon, North Dakota.

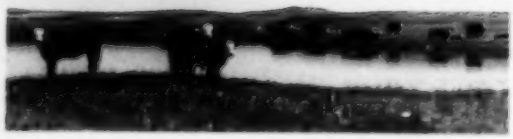
The Sheyenne National Grassland area is characterized by sandy soils that were originally deposited as a delta of an ancient river as it emptied into glacial lake Agassiz. Many acres of these "Dakota Sandhills" were farmed under the Homestead Entry Act.

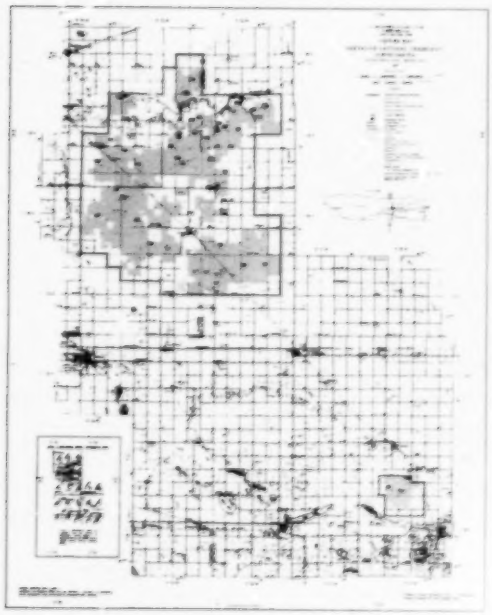
Today cattle grazing is a significant activity on the Sheyenne National Grassland. The Sheyenne supplies seasonal forage for approximately 11,000 mature cattle and their calves, providing over 80,000 animal unit months during the grazing season. This grazing activity contributes to maintaining the local rural economy by providing for cattle belonging to approximately 83 family ranchers who are members of the Sheyenne Valley Grazing Association.

The Sheyenne National Grassland exhibits numerous unique plant, animal, and insect species. One of the largest populations of the Western Prairie White-Fringed Orchid known to exist in the United States occurs on the Sheyenne and surrounding private lands. This very delicate and interesting species is in the process of being placed on the list of threatened and endangered species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The largest population of the Greater Prairie Chicken in North Dakota resides on the Sheyenne, and the Sheyenne and surrounding lands provide habitat for two unique butterfly species, the Dakota Skipper and the Regal Fritillary.

Still another unique feature of the Sheyenne National Grassland is the elm-basswood forest type found associated with the Sheyenne River. This forest community is the most westerly occurrence of the elm-basswood type which is normally found in the eastern United States. Other plant species unique to North Dakota occur in many areas of this elm-basswood habitat and along several springs that flow into the Sheyenne River. Most of these species are common in other states but are very rare in North Dakota.

Recreational opportunities on the Grassland include hunting, hiking, horseback riding, nature observation, primitive camping and even some canoeing and fishing along the Sheyenne River. Approximately 25 miles of the North Country National Scenic Trail will traverse the Sheyenne Grasslands when constructed. This trail is designated for non-motorized use and is part of a 3200 mile Congressionally designated trail extending from Crown Point Historic Site on Lake Champlain in New York to Lake Sakakawea in North Dakota.





DISTRICT OFFICES

**USDA-Forest Service**
McKenzie Ranger District
HC 2, Box 8
Watford City, ND 58854
Phone (701)842-2393

**USDA-Forest Service**
Medora Ranger District
Route 6, Box 131B
Dickinson, ND 58601
Phone (701)225-5151

**USDA, Forest Service**
Grand River Ranger District
P.O. Box 390
Lemmon, SD 57638
(605) 374-3592

**Sheyenne Ranger District**
701 Main
P.O. Box 946
Lisbon, North Dakota 58054
Phone (701)683-4342
Office hours 8:00-4:30

## THE GRASSLANDS TODAY

**Practices to improve vegetation and to better utilize available precipitation continue to be used on the National Grasslands. As vegetative conditions continue to improve, these lands increase in their productivity. The vegetative types that were present before settlement continue to spread in some areas, but the plantations of crested wheatgrass and other exotic species will be visible to the trained eye for many more years.**

**Within the Northern Region, each of the four National Grasslands has a flavor all its own. The tall, grass prairie on rolling sand dunes on the Sheyenne are a significant contrast to the stark badlands found in the Little Missouri National Grasslands.**

## GRAZING ASSOCIATIONS AND NATIONAL GRASSLAND MANAGEMENT

Range management on the National Grassland Districts is administered much differently than on National Forest Districts. From 1938 to 1954, management of the grasslands was under the administration of the Soil Conservation Service whose charge was to insure the rehabilitation of the drought-devastated lands. The SCS stressed participation by local farmers in the development of grazing districts. This resulted in the formation of grazing associations, nonprofit organizations of local landowners who desired to graze cattle on the surrounding government lands. In cooperation with the SCS, the grazing associations and their many members invested much time and many dollars to re-establish vegetative cover on the land and to change land use practices. With the rehabilitation job essentially complete, the administration of these lands was turned over to the Forest Service in 1954.

The Forest Service has continued a partnership effort with the various grazing associations on the National Grasslands where the range management program continues to be closely coordinated and administered through these associations. Today these associations are made up of the livestock producers who have grazing permits on the National Grasslands and who are represented in the association by elected officers and pasture directors who serve on the "Board of Directors."

The grazing associations play a vital role in the management of the grazing program on the National Grassland Districts. Many of the administrative duties associated with the program are handled by these associations which greatly reduces the cost to the public. Forest Service management through the Grazing Association Board of Directors also provides a means to address and resolve issues collectively rather than individually with each livestock producer.

## PARTNERSHIPS WITH DUCKS UNLIMITED

For the past several years the Forest Service, Grazing Associations, the States of North and South Dakota, and various other groups have been cooperating with Ducks Unlimited in development of reservoirs within the Grasslands. The first Ducks Unlimited project in the Northern Region of the Forest Service occurred on the Little Missouri National Grassland in North Dakota in 1984. Prior to this project, Ducks Unlimited activities had been primarily concentrated in the Prairie Pothole country in Canada.

Ducks Unlimited has been, and continues to be, a very important contributor to multiple use of the National Grasslands. Not only have these reservoirs contributed to nesting opportunities for waterfowl, but they have increased the opportunity for water-related recreation and an additional source of water for both domestic livestock and wildlife. The Forest Service considers the efforts of Ducks Unlimited to be an important contribution to the diversity of the National Grasslands, and Ducks Unlimited to be a welcome partner in the management of these lands.

## OIL AND GAS PRODUCTION ON THE LITTLE MISSOURI NATIONAL GRASSLAND

The Little Missouri National Grassland is within the Williston Basin geologic province, which is an important contributor to the Nation's supply of oil and gas. Oil and gas have been produced from the Little Missouri National Grassland for over 30 years. Through cooperation and coordination, oil and gas have been produced from these Federal lands in harmony with other resource values. The minerals ownership of the Little Missouri National Grassland is diverse and provides many opportunities for coordination and cooperation between many State and Federal agencies, oil companies, and individuals.

As of the end of 1988 there were about 675 producing oil and gas wells on the Little Missouri National Grassland. The lease payments and royalties from oil and gas produced return millions of dollars to the U.S. Treasury annually. A portion of these revenues is returned to the State or county and has provided an opportunity for improved roads, schools, and other county facilities.

***For Further Information Call Or Write:*** Custer National Forest

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